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SUBJECT: VIETNAM ON ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP: GO SLOW

REF: STATE 192644

1. (SBU) Summary and Comment: The GVN responded rapidly to the U.S. draft Declaration on a U.S.-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership. Vietnam feels that Busan is coming up much too soon to allow ASEAN and the United States to reconcile the two competing draft declarations (ASEAN has one, completed during an ASEAN meeting in Kuala Lumpur last week) of the Enhanced Partnership declaration. The Foreign Ministry believes that the U.S.-preferred "ASEAN Seven" formulation will not prevail in the face of ASEAN's commitment to consensus and universality. The MFA representative made a strong pitch that the declaration should wait until the "ASEAN-U.S. Summit" in November 2006 in Hanoi, an event that Vietnam has proposed but that we have yet to accept. It was clear from our conversations with the MFA in the last two days that the GVN is fixated on the ASEAN-U.S. Summit's being held in Vietnam next year at the time of the APEC summit. That might be a possible bit of leverage to use to convince the GVN to support the signing of the Enhanced Partnership declaration in Busan. End Summary and Comment.

2. (SBU) Poloff met with ASEAN Section Chief Vu Ho October 19 to deliver refel points and the draft Declaration on the U.S.-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership. Vu Ho complained that the United States did not provide enough time to review a document that was ultimately going to have to receive the Prime Minister's approval, but agreed to shepherd it through the GVN as quickly as possible to try to generate some comment before the USG's October 20 deadline.

3. (SBU) On October 20 MFA's Deputy Director General for ASEAN Nguyen Tien Minh met with Charge and Poloff to deliver Vietnam's initial reaction to the draft declaration. He said that Vietnam "welcomes" the U.S. proposal, and is glad to see that the U.S. draft coincides with the release of an ASEAN draft declaration, which was just completed during the ASEAN Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) in Kuala Lumpur the week of October 17. The United States and ASEAN members "have the same will and intention," he said.

4. (SBU) At the SOM, the officials present discussed the importance of enhanced and accelerated relations with the United States, Minh said. The ASEAN Secretariat had drafted a declaration to be presented to the United States at the Informal Coordination Mechanism (ICM) meeting in Hawaii.

5. (SBU) Minh said that in reviewing the U.S. draft, he was surprised that the United States is proposing to sign the declaration in Busan during the APEC summit. The time remaining before the summit is "too short" to achieve agreement and consensus on the declaration text, he opined, and noted that for ASEAN, the signing of the declaration would require the presence of all members, not just the seven who are part of APEC.

6. (SBU) In addition to the declaration, holding a U.S.-ASEAN summit is also very important, Minh said. "It would have great significance, and both the summit and the declaration signing should happen together." He noted that Assistant Foreign Minister Nguyen Trung Thanh had proposed in the August ASEAN-U.S. meeting in Washington that an ASEAN-U.S. summit occur on the margins of the APEC summit in Hanoi in November 2006. "That would give us the time to craft a good, mutually acceptable declaration," he stated. In addition, the November 2006 date would be auspicious because it falls close to 2007, the year when ASEAN and the United States will celebrate the 30th anniversary of relations.

7. (SBU) Busan, he said, would not work for this declaration. There is too much to accomplish too soon, and the lack of participation of Burma, Cambodia and Laos would be a problem for ASEAN. It would be such a problem, he predicted, that should ASEAN agree to a signing at Busan, it would fly in the leaders of the three non-APEC economies to ensure that ASEAN is represented completely. He recalled that ASEAN had canceled its participation in the ASEM Economic Ministers' meeting in the Netherlands this year because Holland imposed an EU-mandated visa ban on high-level Burmese officials. "This should demonstrate how committed ASEAN is to universality and consensus," he said.

8. (SBU) Privately, and not for the consumption of other ASEAN members, Minh stressed how beneficial for U.S.-Vietnam bilateral relations it would be for the signing to occur

during an ASEAN Summit held in Hanoi during the 2006 APEC Summit. "This would be very significant for both of our countries." He also promised to discuss the issue with the Vietnamese delegation in Hawaii led by Deputy Director General for ASEAN Nguyen Hong Cong.

BOARDMAN